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Miss Deborah Haywood
Headteacher
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Bearwood Primary School

Dear Miss Haywood

Short inspection of Bearwood Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 21 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in March 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Pupils continue to learn and achieve well. They benefit from a curriculum that makes a strong contribution to their love of learning and personal development. The school places great emphasis on its mission to be 'opening up a world of opportunities' for pupils. Pupils have frequent opportunities to find out about the wider world as they visit new places and enjoy different experiences.

You and your deputy have built a team that is constantly striving for excellence. You both know the school very well and lead it with energy and a clear sense of purpose. Governors are proud of the school and share your ambition. An external review of governance, which was carried out in March 2017, indicated that governors offer effective challenge to leaders within the school. This view was supported by the inspection findings. You ensure that governors are kept well informed about the strengths of the school and the priorities for future development.

Parents and carers appreciate the close relationships that exist between the school and families. They are particularly appreciative of the home-school link worker who supports families when necessary. They said that she is exceptionally approachable and they see her as an asset to the school.

Teachers have ensured that pupils' interests are stimulated by the vibrant and

immaculate learning environment. High-quality displays celebrate pupils' achievements across all areas of the curriculum. Learning walls in classrooms provide pupils with resources that they are able to use most effectively to enhance their work.

The pupils I spoke to said that they enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in their good attendance. Pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school, as they are courteous and caring towards one another. They come to lessons expecting to work hard. As a result, they make the most of the many opportunities that are afforded to them by the school.

Since the last inspection, you have focused particularly on developing the quality of teaching and learning and building a team of effective middle and senior leaders. The staff are provided with clear feedback about their teaching. This feedback, along with the training and professional development they receive, means that teachers are able to put the changes you plan into action effectively.

Further work is needed to improve the quality of writing across the school, so that achievement in writing matches achievement in reading and mathematics. Leaders have identified this as a priority for development and have strategies in place to address this.

Safeguarding is effective.

You give safeguarding a high priority, and a strong safeguarding culture runs through the school.

Staff are knowledgeable about potential risks to children's well-being. They are very clear about the school's procedures for reporting any concerns they have regarding the safeguarding of pupils. Staff record information carefully, so that a picture can be built up over time for each pupil. Weekly safeguarding meetings are held, which ensures that pupils' needs and circumstances are known very well to those responsible for their welfare.

The deputy headteacher attends the monthly local authority forums to ensure that she is kept up to date and well informed about best practice. The school's safeguarding procedures are regularly quality assured by a member of the governing body who has suitable expertise.

Pupils said that they feel safe in school. The curriculum provides them with important information about keeping safe and healthy. For example, on the day of the inspection Year 6 pupils were participating in a drug awareness workshop led by the local authority drug education team. Pupils also spoke to me about the importance of internet safety, and they are fully aware of the dangers of sharing personal information when using computers or mobile telephones.

Inspection findings

- I focused some of the inspection activity on considering the impact of the drive to improve reading across the school, as this has been an important focus for the school, given the number of pupils who enter school speaking very limited English. I found that reading has a high profile in the school. Books are celebrated in displays, and teachers have engendered a true love of reading. Pupils and staff recommend books to each other. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to experience reading a diverse range of texts. This is seen as a valuable means of enabling pupils to encounter and learn about aspects of life that would ordinarily be beyond their life experience. During the inspection, pupils in Year 3 were particularly inspired by the poetry of local poet Benjamin Zephaniah. They could talk knowledgeably about how his life experiences in Birmingham have been a strong influence on his poetry.
- I also considered the impact of leaders' strategies to improve the quality of writing across the school. Teachers place great emphasis on modelling an effective piece of writing and using the structure of that piece as a basis for pupils' own writing. Evidence in pupils' workbooks demonstrates that they are given many opportunities to write extensively. Writing skills are systematically taught and then drawn together in a piece of extended writing. For example, pupils in Year 6 created summary descriptions of circus act characters and then used these to compose some persuasive writing, which aimed to convince readers to go to the circus.
- Standards in writing do not yet match the standards achieved in reading. However, leaders' strategies to improve reading across the school are beginning to show a positive effect on the standards of writing. Through focusing much of the learning around a class book, pupils are being introduced to a widening vocabulary. There is still more to do to encourage pupils to think deeply about their sentence structures and vocabulary choices with respect to the intended effect on the reader.
- A final focus for the inspection was the extent to which pupils are being challenged in key stage 1. Inspection evidence demonstrates that pupils are achieving very well in the Year 1 phonics check. This is impressive given the large number of pupils who enter school with very little or no English. The work the school has done at whole-school level to address reading has had a notable impact in key stage 1. A large proportion of Year 2 pupils are on track to achieve higher standards in reading by the end of the year.
- Leaders have worked to improve pupils' skills and confidence in using mathematical reasoning. This has led to key changes being made to the curriculum and the way in which teachers teach mathematics. Pupils are now routinely given opportunities to reason for themselves, using a range of practical resources and to explain their reasoning to others.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- standards of writing continue to improve by giving pupils more opportunity to think deeply about how sentence construction and vocabulary choices can influence the reader.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sandwell. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Helen Davies
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you and the deputy headteacher. I also met with several members of school staff and two members of the governing body. I also spoke to your local authority adviser. Together with you and your deputy, I planned the key lines of enquiry for the inspection. I visited classes in the school with leaders to observe pupils' learning, speak with them and look at their books. We looked at an extensive range of current books from each year group. I also spoke with pupils at breaktime and during the day. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered 25 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I looked at a range of documentation, including information about safeguarding, attendance and the work of the governors. I also scrutinised and discussed the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement.